Bodhisattva Precepts and Their Compatibility with *Vinaya* in Contemporary Chinese Buddhism: A Cross-Straits Comparative Study* (Part 2)

Tzu-Lung Chiu
The Research Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (RIHSS),
Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan

Abstract

Bodhisattva ideas have steadily developed since medieval times, to become key characteristics of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. Monks and nuns in the Mahāyāna tradition generally have bodhisattva precepts conferred upon them while undergoing the Triple Platform Ordination, and adhering to both these precepts and the *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts is a conspicuous feature of Mahāyāna monastic practice. Against this backdrop, it is worth exploring Chinese monastics' perceptions of the bodhisattva precepts and ideal, and the practices surrounding them, in the current sociocultural contexts of Taiwan and Mainland China. Though both these regions share the same tradition of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, it has very different manifestations. This long-term, cross-Straits comparative study also reveals a hitherto under-theorized conflict between *vinaya* rules and the bodhisattva ideal.

Keywords: Vinaya, Bodhisattva Precepts, Buddhist nuns, contemporary Chinese Buddhism

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2.2 *Bodhisattva* and *Bhikṣu/Bhikṣuṇī* Precepts in Conflict

While some existing literature has explicitly discussed the differences between *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts,[1] it is not unsurprising that some of my Mainland Chinese informant nuns referred spontaneously to the compatibility of these two sets of precepts. For example, my interviewees at Qifu Si and Zizhulin both volunteered that *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts complement each other without conflict. One interviewee at Dingguang Si even responded to one of my questions by saying straightforwardly that there is no conflict between *śrāvaka* precepts and *bodhisattva* ones, and asking rhetorically how monastic members could attain Buddhahood if their minds were in conflict between one *dharma* (the *bodhisattva* precepts) and another (*vinaya*)? Even this nun, however, indicated that *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts and *bodhisattva* ones differed, at least in emphasis: the former focusing on self-benefit and the latter on benefiting others.

Additionally, two Mainland Chinese informants provided interesting answers to my questions about the issue of *bodhisattva* practice within Mahāyāna Buddhism. One, at Dingguang Si, used a story of the Buddha to clarify her standpoint: Buddhists cannot tell a lie.[2] When the Buddha was alive, he saw a rabbit running away, and a hunter asked him whether he had seen the rabbit. The Buddha said no, so the hunter left. Then Ānanda asked the Buddha why he had lied, and the Buddha answered that the rabbit would

1. Charles Wei-hsun Fu, "Mixed Precepts, the Bodhisattva Precept, and the Preceptless Precept: A Critical Comparison of the Chinese and Japanese Buddhist Views of Śila/Vinaya," in *Buddhist Behavioral Codes and the Modern World. An International Symposium*, ed. C. Wei-hsun Fu and S. A. Wawrytko (New York, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 246–249. Donald S. Lopez, *The Story of Buddhism. A Concise Guide to Its History & Teachings* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 149–150. Shih Ruijin 釋瑞今, "The Similarities and Dissimilarities between the Bodhisattva Precepts and Bhiksu's Precepts" 菩薩戒與比丘戒之異同, *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal* 46 (2008): 287–295.

2. According to the 1st *pācittika* rule, "[i]f a *bhikṣuṇī* deliberately lies, she [commits] a *pācittika*." Translated in Ann Heirman, *The Discipline in Four Parts: Rules for Nuns According to the Dharmaguptakavinaya*, 3 vols (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002), 529.

have met its death if he had told the hunter where to find it.[3] As the nun saw it, this story meant that the Buddha told an expedient "white lie" to save another sentient being, which was in keeping with the Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* tradition. By way of conclusion, she remarked that Chinese Buddhist monastics do not forget receiving *bodhisattva* precepts, even as they observe *śrāvaka* ones in the meantime. Similarly, a nun from Chongfu Si gave an example of an exception to the rule that monastic members may not have physical contact with the opposite sex. According to the 5th *pārājika* rule, "[i]f a *bhikṣuṇī* has defiled thoughts and has physical contact with a man with defiled thoughts below the armpit and above the knee… this *bhikṣuṇī* [commits] a *pārājika*…That is 'to have physical contact.'"[4] This rule would even forbid a nun from saving a man who has fallen into a river because she would have to touch him. However, according to the *bodhisattva* precepts, the nun must save the drowning man because she must show mercy to all sentient beings. From these two nuns' comments, we can see that some behaviors forbidden in the *vinaya* are deemed acceptable within the spirit of the *bodhisattva* ideal, provided that they occur under certain specific conditions involving compassion for others.

While some Mainland Chinese nuns' perceptions that there is no incompatibility between these two systems may be based on textual references, their responses nevertheless revealed a cautious or even defensive position when discussing these issues with me, perhaps because I was not a member of the monastic community.[5] Another group of my informants, meanwhile, also conceded the existence of some differences or tensions between *bodhisattva* precepts and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* ones, but did not use concrete textual references or examples from their daily lives to support the positions they took. It is also worth noting that, broadly speaking, the views of Mainland Chinese interviewees on these matters were more conservative than those of their

3. The nun, however, did not give me concrete textual references for this story.

4. Ann Heirman, *The Discipline in Four Parts: Rules for Nuns According to the Dharmaguptakavinaya*, 3 vols (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002), 252.

5. Still, we should not overlook the possibility that the above statements could be interpreted from the Buddhist apologist viewpoint: Buddhist followers understandably defending their faith against outsider criticism.

Taiwanese counterparts. One senior nun in Taiwan's Luminary Nunnery, for example, explicitly presented a theorized conflict between the *vinaya* rule against money-handling[6] and the *bodhisattva* precept that allows the acceptance of money on behalf of sentient beings in the *Pusa jie* ben:

> Not Accepting [an] Offering: If a Bodhisattva, out of anger or pride, resists and rejects offering[s] of gold, silver, pearls, wish-fulfilling pearls, lazurite, and various treasures, this is named a transgression, multiple transgression, is a transgression of a defiled nature because one forsakes sentient beings. If [done] out of laziness or slackness, such a transgression is of an undefiled nature.[7]

As interpreted by this Luminary nun, the precepts suggest that a *bodhisattva* is allowed to accept gold, silver, money, and treasures for the sake of sentient beings. The *bodhisattva* precepts, according to this nun, are more open than Buddhist *śrāvaka* precepts because *bodhisattva* and *śrāvaka* precepts have vastly different standpoints and foci, compounded by various interpretations. She commented that those who follow Buddhist precepts strictly believe that accepting gold or silver from others one has breached the rule of not touching money. Those who follow the *bodhisattva* precepts hold the belief that accepting valuable offerings will benefit sentient beings, even though it sits uncomfortably alongside their own adherence to the precept of not touching money.[8] However,

For the sake of liberating sentient beings, a practitioner of the bodhisattva path is allowed to accept gold, silver, money, and treasures.

6. T22.n1428, p618c22–619c25.
7. Shi Chuan Guan and Lee Cheng Soon, trans., *Selected Translations of Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra* (2012), 108, http://ftp.budaedu.org/ebooks/pdf/ CE018.pdf (accessed October 11, 2019). T24.n1500, p1107c06-9.
8. The Luminary nun stressed that Buddhist monks and nuns following the bodhisattva precepts strictly would not transgress *pārājika* and *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offenses in *śrāvaka* precepts unless they want to renounce the precepts and return to secular life.

Monastics in Taiwanese monasteries cooking and serving meals to devotees is commonly seen. (Pictured are Venerables from the Thousand Buddha Bodhi Temple in Tainan preparing food).

being a *bodhisattva* does not imply that monastic members may accept anything without restrictions. Those who have attachment to treasures transgress another *bodhisattva* precept in *Pusa jie ben*, which was also mentioned by the Luminary nun I interviewed:

> Being Greedy for Material Wealth: If a Bodhisattva, with much desire and discontent has greed for and is attached to material wealth, this is named a transgression[.][9]

The nun explicitly used textual references to support a position on the contradiction between the *bodhisattva* precept (of accepting money) and the *vinaya* rule (against touching money). This shows that those who follow the *bodhisattva* precepts and path may compromise themselves in terms of transgressing a rule in order to benefit others. Another senior Luminary nun also shared an explicit example about the differences between the *bodhisattva* and

9. Shi Chuan Guan and Lee Cheng Soon, trans. *Selected Translations of Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra* (2012), 107, http://ftp.budaedu.org/ebooks/pdf/ CE018.pdf (accessed October 11, 2019). T24.n1500, p1107 b14-b15.

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Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism

bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī precepts as applied in day-to-day life:

> Some nuns from other institutions came here to study at Buddhist College but many found it hard to adapt to our lifestyle here. For example, here we monastics cook for laypeople.[10] They wonder why we cook for students and laypeople. However, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, I as a *bodhisattva* am willing to do everything, as long as it benefits all sentient beings. No matter who you are, whether a layperson or not. I am willing to do anything meaningful, and offer it to all sentient beings and future Buddha. Do you see the difference between *śrāvaka* precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts? This [cooking for laypeople] is the difference: the *śrāvaka* precept is strict [i.e., makes a strict distinction between monastics and laity]. Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* precepts treat both equally, as long as you have the *bodhi* mind that everyone is a future Buddha. That is the difference.

The example of cooking for laypeople raises an important possibility for rethinking how the *bodhisattva* ideal is put into practice. According to the 113th *pācittika* rule, "[i]f a *bhikṣuṇī* carries out orders for a lay person, she [commits] a *pācittika*."[11] A *pācittika* is a minor offence that can be dealt with by making a formal act of repentance. The Luminary nun's comments above implicitly reveal that cooking for laypeople is not a perfect observance of the *śrāvaka* precepts. However, as she saw it, this action was compatible with *bodhisattva* practice, since it benefits others, all of whom are regarded as having the potential to become a future Buddha. The same nun also commented that no differentiation or discrimination should be made between laity and non-laity, since both are treated equally as a future Buddha in terms of *bodhisattva* practice. Her viewpoint reveals how *bodhisattva* precepts (and in particular, their starting-point of benefiting others) contribute to monastics' openness and flexibility when dealing with various events they encounter in daily life. Meanwhile, the

10. Nuns are assigned to work in the kitchen as trainees. The nunnery regularly holds activities and Buddhist courses for laypeople and young students.

11. Translated in Ann Heirman, *The Discipline in Four Parts: Rules for Nuns According to the Dharmaguptakavinaya*, 3 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002), 753.

fact that nuns from other institutions who were studying at Luminary Nunnery temporarily found it uncomfortable serving laypeople, interpreting this as transgressing *śrāvaka* precepts, signally reminds us of another phenomenon that we cannot neglect: that monastics' divergent attitudes and values regarding precept observance relate to individual and/or institutional conditions and contexts; the adaptability and flexibility of Buddhism; and the local level of interaction between society and laity. This being the case, the atmosphere of Luminary Nunnery generally appears to be more open and active than that of some of other nunneries in Taiwan. It regularly holds activities and courses for laypeople and young students as a means of propagating a form of Buddhism that includes close interaction with society at large. However, it remains an open question whether Luminary nuns' flexible views of the observance of precepts is more a cause, or a consequence, or both, of the high value they place upon the practice of the *bodhisattva* ideal for the sake of benefiting sentient beings.

From the above, it might seem that the views of my Mainland Chinese informants, or at any rate the answers they provided to me, were less sophisticated than those of their Taiwanese counterparts. Therefore, it seemed worthwhile to ask explicitly about Mainland Chinese nuns' attitudes toward the act of burning the fingers or body encouraged in the *Fanwang jing*, as a means of probing deeper into the question of the contradiction between *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts. According to the 16th minor precept in *Fanwang jing*, which mentions the action of finger and body burning as an offering to the Buddha,

> when you see a newly initiated bodhisattva who has come from as far away as a hundred or a thousand *li* [kilometers] for the Great Vehicle scriptures or Vinaya, you should, according to Buddhist doctrine, explain all of the arduous practices, such as the burning of the body, burning of the arm, and burning of the fingers. If he will not burn his body, arms, or fingers, as offerings to the Buddhas he is not a renounced bodhisattva[.][12]

12. T24.n1484, p1006a17–a20. Charles Muller, *Exposition of the Sutra of Brahmā's Net* (Seoul, Korea: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, 2012), 349.

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Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism

According to a Chongfu Si nun, Buddhist monastics "offend the precepts if they hurt themselves; but they violate *bodhisattva* precepts if they do not burn their fingers or body." A Zizhulin nun had a similar response, "You don't offend the precepts if you don't burn your fingers, but if you burn your fingers you must practice the *bodhisattva* path." These two nuns' statements clearly suggest the existence of a paradox. Interestingly, the same Chongfu Si nun told me about her personal experience of witnessing a monk's ascetic practice of burning his fingers over a period of years. She said he did not feel physical pain because he was separated from his body, adding that "[t]he *bodhisattva*'s state of mind transcends experiencing physical pain. Conventional explanations do not capture the *bodhisattva*'s experience—only a sage can understand this."[13] This monk's experience of painless burning, however, was not seen as an exceptional case.[14] Rather, his ascetic practice was seen as illustrative of how bodily form can be eradicated, and how there is no suffering in the state of formlessness. However, this abstract state of mind and level of religious devotion are difficult for ordinary people to comprehend, since it would be normal to feel pain if they burned their finger or arm, never mind the whole body; and as such, the Chongfu Si nun remarked, only a sage could understand the *bodhisattva* experience. As for Buddhist immolation, the Zizhulin nun offered an interesting observation, "Buddhist monastics burn their fingers with great faith and mind to

13. This monk may have achieved the status of non-self-attachment through *bodhisattva* practice. Jianguang Wang annotated the 16th minor precept in the *Fanwang jing*, to the effect that if Buddhists do not follow this burning practice, they are regarded as still having bodily attachment; but that this opinion is not the way of the *bodhisattva*. One who lives an ascetic life for years will achieve the status of not seeing him- or herself, and reduce attachment to self. One begins to see the *dharma* body when there is no appearance of form in the self. See Wang Jianguang, *New Translation of Brahmā-net* 新譯梵網經 (Taipei: San Min, 2005), 180–181.

14. According to the *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* 續高僧傳 , the monk Sengyai 僧崖 (488–562 CE) was asked whether he felt pain while burning himself. He replied that pain arose from the mind, so why would his fingers suffer when the mind was not in pain? (T50.n2060, p0678c21–c23). Another monk asked Sengyai why *bodhisattva*s did not experience physical pain when they were on fire. Sengyai replied that sentient beings have forms precisely so that they may feel pain when burning (T50.n2060, p0679c11–c13).

substitute for people's suffering, showing that the body is impermanent." This suggests that this practice is a form of self-sacrifice to benefit all sentient beings. This nun's comment on burning also corresponds to the stories of Sengyai. A monk asked Sengyai whether it was possible to substitute for sentient beings' suffering. Sengyai replied that if one has the intention to do so, why isn't it possible? The monk asked again, "*Bodhisattvas* burn themselves and sentient beings commit transgressions. Each bears their own hardship. How is it that one can substitute for sentient beings' suffering? Sengyai replied that it is like the wholesome intention of one burning their finger as an offering. If sentient beings can appreciate it and eliminate their unwholesome acts, then wouldn't this be a kind of substitution where sentient beings have changed their unwholesome actions to wholesome?[15]

The above discussion reveals a number of facets of opinion regarding immolation in monastics' religious faith, which is explicitly countenanced in the *Fanwang jing*. It is, however, worth mentioning in this context that the Buddhist Association of China (BAC)[16] has forbidden monastic members to burn their fingers.[17] Due to the limited scope of this study, burning acts in medieval

15. T50.n2060, p679c14–c17.

16. The BAC, founded in 1953 as the official organization of Buddhism in Mainland China, but suspended between 1966 and 1980, today has branches on the provincial, county and sometimes city levels. It supports Buddhist educational and research institutions, and assists local efforts to build and maintain temples and safeguard holy sites.

17. In Chinese history, many rulers opposed burning, probably because the masses of people who gathered to witness it were seen as a potential threat to the ruling class's governance. See Lin, Hui Sheng 林 惠 勝 , "Self-burning of Fingers and Body—One Important Facet of the Lotus Belief in Middle Age of China" 燃指焚身—中國中世法華信仰之一面向 , *Journal of Religion and Culture of National Cheng Kung University* 成大宗教與文化學報 1 (2001): 99–101, http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-MAG/mag128633.pdf (accessed 25 October 2019). For example, the *Biqiuni zhuan* (T50. n2063, p941b13–b20) records that the nun Huiyao 慧 耀 was prevented from burning her body as a worship offering by a local governor. Examples of Chinese monks who requested the ruler's permission to burn themselves also can be found in the *Hongzan Fahua zhuan* 弘贊法華傳 (e.g., Sengming 僧明 , T51.n2067, p24b27–c13; Daodu 道度 , T51.n2067, p24c14–p25a21) and in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (e.g., Fayu 法羽 , T50. n2059, p404c11–c18). Lin, "Self-burning of Fingers and Body," 100–101.

Chinese Buddhism will not be further explored here.[18] On the other hand, the practice of burning scars on the scalp as a means of demonstrating one's religious faith and devotion (which is similar to the act of burning discussed above) should not be overlooked in studies of the contemporary Buddhism of Taiwan and Mainland China, whether it is actually practiced or not. The ordination-ritual custom of placing incense balls on preceptees' head and burning them to make a scar[19] plays an important role in the final stage of Triple Platform Ordination in Taiwan, and has resulted in most monastics having had at least three scars on their scalps since 1953.[20] One of my informants, who

18. For details, see James Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007) and Lin, "Self-burning of Fingers and Body," 57–120. For instance, Hui Sheng Lin indicates that self-immolation has been prevalent among Buddhist monastics since the Sixth Dynasty (Lin, "Self-burning of Fingers and Body," 60). The prime examples can be found in the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (T.2063), which recounts that six nuns took their own lives by burning themselves (Lin, "Self-burning of Fingers and Body," 65–67). Additionally, the translation of the Śūraṅgama *Sūtra* suggests that in the Tang dynasty, monastics worshipped Buddhist relics (*śarīra*) with the admiration and support of the Tang Emperor Xianzong (憲宗). Acts of finger- or body-burning attracted numerous Buddhists to follow suit (Lin, "Self-burning of Fingers and Body," p. 90). Several monks in medieval China were also recorded as having undergone self-immolation in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (T.2059), *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (T.2060) and *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (T.2061) (ibid: 65–72).

19. The practice of burning at ordination occurs only in Chinese Buddhism. For a detailed introduction to the custom's history and the practice in China, see James Benn, "Where Text Meets Flesh: Burning the Body as an Apocryphal Practice in Chinese Buddhism," *History of Religions* 37, no. 4 (1998): 303–310. Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism 1900–1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 298–300.

20. Jiang Canteng [Cian-teng] 江燦騰 , *Contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism* 台灣當代佛教 (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 2000), 126. After the PRC government came to power in Mainland China in 1949, many refugee Mainland Chinese monks came to Taiwan. In 1953, the Buddhist ordination ceremony was regarded as the first postwar transmission of higher ordination by Taiwan's Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC). For details, see Charles Brewer Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660–1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 97–136.

came from Hong Kong but was ordained a nun in Taiwan in 2009, described the final stage of the Triple Platform Ordination as follows:

> The preceptees continued rehearsing for *bodhisattva* ordination and practiced repentance ritual, to complete the third ordination on Days 40 through 51. On Day 52, the preceptees engaged in visualizations of Sakyamuni Buddha, Manjushri, and Maitreya Buddha conferring *bodhisattva* precepts, gently inviting the ordinands with three *vinaya* master monks. One teacher explained to the student preceptees why following the traditional way of personal religious practice was necessary, even though certain alternative methods are permitted when preaching Buddhism in ways appropriate to modern people's needs. It was also deemed important to follow the older generation's way of chanting Buddhist *sūtras* rather than casually amending it, because chanting to the Buddha is very solemn. In the evening there was another incense-burning ritual to worship the Buddha. Preceptors put three incense balls on preceptees' heads, burning it to make a scar, after which ritual *Parināma* was practiced. The final day consisted of *bodhisattva* ordination for the preceptees, who received the precepts' substance via visualization.

In my personal experience of living in Taiwan, authentic monastics there are recognizable by these scalp scars. Venerable Ching Hsin淨心,[21] honorary president of the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (Taiwan), said of this burning practice in the ordination ceremony:

> There is no practice of burning scars in Mainland China because it is against government regulations. Monastic members in Theravāda Buddhism do not receive *bodhisattva* precepts so they have no burning practice. This practice of burning scars originates in *bodhisattva* precepts in the *Fanwang jing*, which asks monastic

21. Ven. Ching Hsin (1929–2009) is a well-known senior monk in Taiwan, who has more than 40 years' experience of conducting the Triple Platform ordination ceremony held by the BAROC.

> members to burn their body or arms as an offering to the Buddha while receiving Mahāyāna precepts. We, however, cannot burn our arms or bodies, so we burn three scars on the scalp to show religious determination and destroy self-attachment. Thus, the ordination hall still practices this custom for monastic members who receive *bodhisattva* precepts, for this reason[.][22]

Counterintuitively, the act of burning appears to be more important in *vinaya*-centric monasteries than in others. Yet must monastics and laypeople receive burn scars on their arms while receiving the *bodhisattva* precepts? Are there exceptions? The answers given by the *vinaya* discussion group of *Zheng jue jing she* 正覺精舍律學研討小組 imply that people should burn scars onto their arms and fingers as an offering to the Buddha in accordance with the scriptures regarding *bodhisattva* precepts. That is, if people cannot tolerate the minor pain of a burn, it is questionable that they will be able to practice and tolerate the hard path of the *bodhisattva*.[23]

Buddhists in Taiwan have marks singed on their arms when they receive the bodhisattva precepts. Pictured is the 2015 Five Precepts and Bodhisattva Precepts Ceremony held at Fo Guang Shan, with the venerables marking the preceptees' arms. (Photo by Chen Pi-yun)

22. Hsieh, Hsin-Hsin, "Contemporary Buddhist Monastics' Perspective on Vinaya and their Life Practice in Taiwan" 當代台灣佛教僧尼的戒律觀及其生活實踐 (MA diss., Hsuan Chuang University, 2005), 105.
23. *Dispelling Doubt about Vinaya Study* 律學釋疑 (Nantou, Taiwan: Zheng jue jing she 正覺精舍 , 2008), 397.

The ordination custom of putting incense balls or *moxa* on a preceptee's head for the purpose of scarification was officially abolished in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1983, by the Second Conference of the Fourth Standing Council of the BAC 中國佛教協會第四屆理事會第二次會議. This ban had two grounds: (1) that it was not an original Indian Buddhist ritual, and (2) that it impairs monastics' physical health.[24] The BAC's decision, however, may have had a political subtext, insofar as the PRC government directly controls all decisions or policies made by the BAC.[25] The PRC government announced that this ritual custom was "illegal" and rejected "any form of self-mortification."[26] Bianchi's fieldwork data confirmed that *moxa* was not performed in Mainland China monasteries,[27] and my fieldwork observations resonate with hers: i.e., most nuns I met or interviewed in the PRC do not have scalp scars, with some citing a preference for expressing their religious devotions in private.[28] One senior nun stressed that current religious regulations regarding ordination are

24. *The Voice of Dharma* 法音雜誌 *Fayin zazhi*, vol. 4 (Beijing: The Buddhist Association of China, 1984), 5–6. "Decision Concerning the Tonsure and Ordination Problems in Monasteries of Han People's Buddhism" 關於漢族佛教寺廟剃度傳戒問題的決議 . The ninth article of Chapter 1 of the Procedures for the Management and Administration of Three Platform Monastic Ordination in Chinese Buddhist Temples Nationwide 全國漢傳佛教寺院傳授三壇大戒管理辦法 , as revised and approved by the BAC, required that "The ordination ritual custom of putting incense balls on preceptees' heads and burning it to make a scar shall be abolished." See also the website of the PRC's State Administration for Religions Affairs.

25. For example, the PRC government has the power to decide "which monasteries should be reopened, how many monks and nuns should be recruited, and which monks and nuns should be restored to leadership positions. None of these key matters were decided democratically by the Buddhist populations." See Qin Wenjie, *The Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China: Women Reconstruct Buddhism on Mt. Emei* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2000), 238.

26. Ester Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery "Tiexiangsi": A Buddhist Nunnery of Tibetan Tradition in Contemporary China* (Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 2001), 94.

27. Ibid.

28. According to Amandine Péronnet's fieldwork observations in Pushou Si, many nuns there had the scalp scars. The guest prefect (*Zhike* 知客) of the same nunnery had nine scalp scars when I met her.

more detailed and standardized (than they were in the past); and in combination with reasonable fears about ordinands' physical safety, this has made the ritual custom of burning scalp scars at ordination ceremonies effectively impossible. However, one of my Mainland Chinese informants shared different information: i.e., that the custom of burning scalp scars was held at the end of Triple Platform ordination in Baochan Si 褒禪寺 in 2016. This was not a compulsory option, but decided upon by each preceptee. In the same vein, one teacher nun from another nunnery also told me that the ordination hall could help fulfill the wishes of those preceptees who wanted scalp scars. From the diverse opinions I collected, the extent of the practical effect of official abolition of this ritual custom is questionable.

To sum up, while Mainland China and Taiwan both share similar contexts of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, one key difference—the burning of scalp scars in ordination ceremonies—reminds us that we cannot ignore the ways in which various regions' politics and government policies exert important influences on Buddhist religious practices. Even more significantly, the *bodhisattva* ideal/path itself appears to be developing differently in these two regions, as will be discussed in detail below.

2.3 Socially Engaged Practitioners of the *Bodhisattva* Path

In the previous sections, I have attempted to capture contemporary Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese nuns' perceptions of abstract issues: the sometimes contradictory relationship between *vinaya* rules, and on the other hand, the *bodhisattva* precepts and the *bodhisattva* ideal of benefiting others. In this section, I will focus on nuns' practical experience of socially engaged practice in both regions, with special attention to cross-Straits differences in the manifestations of such practice arising from differences in their historical and political development and current socio-economic situations. I shall thus discuss the nuanced differences in how monastics in these two states engage in social work and religious life.

Ching-chy Huang has suggested that Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*

人間佛教)[29] in Taiwan represents the modern promulgation and development of the Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* path, citing Master Taixu, Yinshun, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, and Sheng Yen's viewpoints on the *bodhisattva* precepts, which have become greatly valued in Humanistic Buddhism.[30] In practice, the nuns from DDM (Dharma Drum Mountain), Luminary Nunnery, Fo Guang Shan, and other institutions whom I met during my fieldwork have engaged in a variety of forms of public service: some have preached Buddhist Dharma to laypeople; some have been engaged in education, running Buddhist monastic colleges and presses or teaching in universities; some have devoted their time to philanthropic activities; and some have worked in palliative care in hospitals, hospices, and so on. These Taiwanese nuns' commitments to serving society, with the wider aim of liberating and benefiting all sentient beings, undoubtedly embodies the spirit of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan.[31]

29. Some leading contemporary masters in Taiwan—such as the late Sheng Yen (Fagushan) and Venerable Master Hsing Yun (Fo Guang Shan)—have advocated Humanistic Buddhism through various objectives and activities, including monastic and secular education, welfare work and environmental protection. For overviews and discussions of Humanistic Buddhism, see especially Long Darui, "Humanistic Buddhism from Venerable Tai Xu to Grand Master Hsing Yun," *Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism* 1 (2000): 53–84. Also, Don A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

30. Huang Ching-chy 黃靖琦, "The Study of Relationship Between the Bodhisattva Path and the Bodhisattva Precepts—Based on the Chinese Translation of *Yogācāra-bhūmi·śīla-paṭala*" 菩薩道與菩薩戒關係之研究——以漢譯《瑜伽師地論·戒品》為中心 (MA diss., Graduate Institute of Religious Studies, Fo Guang University, Taiwan, 2006), 113–127.

31. While DeVido notes that many Buddhist organizations and individual monastics in Taiwan contribute to the promulgation of Humanistic Buddhism, this socially-engaged work appears to inevitably affect monastic members religious practice. For example, Stuart Chandler points out that some monks and nuns decided to leave Fo Guang Shan order and join other monasteries since the Humanistic Buddhism has diverted themselves from their personal spiritual cultivation. Elise Anne DeVido, *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns* (Albany: State University of New york Press, 2010), 93. Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 209.

Nuns in Mainland China tend to focus on individual spiritual cultivation, or teaching and studying at the Buddhist colleges, and rarely engage with the local communities.

In sharp contrast to this, my fieldwork observations in Mainland China indicated that some nuns focused mainly on individual spiritual cultivation in their own rooms,[32] and/or on their teaching inside Buddhist colleges, and seldom left their nunneries to make contact with people in the local community, except as part of a monastic travel group. The main exceptions to this pattern of behavior were high-ranking administrative nuns or famous nuns.[33] In other words, the influence of Humanistic Buddhism—so strong in Taiwan—appears to be quite weak there. Raoul Birnbaum points out that monks in Nanputuo Monastery 南普陀 (whose former abbot, Taixu, was a founding figure of Humanistic Buddhism) and *Shishi chanyuan* 石室禪院 have engaged

32. Some of my Mainland Chinese informant nuns also specifically confirmed my general observations regarding their religious schedule and practice. It is, however, worth noting that some nuns in Taiwan before the end of the War of Resistance Against Japan also engaged in similar religious cultivation via chanting and ritual–until the arrival of Mainland Chinese monks, who taught the nuns Buddhist *dharma* and education. Shih Heng-Ching 釋恆清 , "Daughters of the Buddha on the Way to Enlightenment" 菩提道上的善女人 (Taipei: Dongda Press, 1995), 174–177.

33. The nunneries I visited, however, are not representative of all Buddhist institutions in Mainland China and Taiwan, since the fieldwork results may be affected by the selection process, and by the fact that researchers are not admitted by a number of them. As such, findings about the socially engaged practitioners of the *bodhisattva* path in Chinese Buddhist institutions at different institutional or school types (e.g., pure land, Chan, *Vinaya* schools, and so on) and/or in different regions will inevitably vary. Other researchers should bear this in mind when evaluating their own fieldwork data.

in charity work for the elderly, ill and infirm, as well as in children's education;[34] but while these two Chinese monasteries are currently serving their community, "reflect[ing] a modernist understanding of the process necessary to establish a pure land in the human realm," this is "an exception to the general conservative trend."[35] Unlike those in the two above-mentioned monasteries, the majority of current monastics in Mainland China hold a "consciousness-only pure land" view, with a traditional focus on *sūtra* reading rather than on the translation of *renjian fojiao* into social action that was remarked upon by Chandler.[36] Wenjie Qin's findings likewise resonate with Chandler's:

> The social movement inspired by these contemporary teachings [i.e., Humanistic Buddhism] is taking place mostly in Taiwan and the overseas Chinese Buddhist communities. In Mainland China, due to the political restraints on religion, this notion has so far remained largely a guide for meditation rather than for social campaigns.[37]

In other words, the PRC's government appears to be the key obstacle to the emergence of Buddhist social services there. Similarly, recent research on Buddhist charities in contemporary Mainland China by Zhe Ji and André Laliberté more or less echoes Qin's above-quoted remarks. On the one hand, the PRC government has allowed, and even encouraged, certain Buddhist institutions to become involved with some philanthropic activities and social services.[38] However, these religious groups still lack autonomy, as

34. Raoul Birnbaum, "Buddhist China at the Century's Turn," *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 444.

35. Stuart Chandler, "Buddhism in China and Taiwan: The Dimensions of Contemporary Chinese Buddhism," *Buddhism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspective*, ed. Stephen C. Berkwitz (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 192.

36. Ibid.

37. Qin Wenjie, "The Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China: Women Reconstruct Buddhism on Mt. Emei" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2000), 405.

38. For a detailed discussion of recent Buddhist charities in Mainland China, see André Laliberté, "Buddhist Charities and China's Social Policy: An Opportunity for Alternate Civility?" *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 158 (2012): 101–112.

佛光山 人间佛教研究院
Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism

political restraints on religion still exist in Mainland China today. Laliberté nevertheless comments optimistically on the charitable works engaged in by some Mainland China Buddhist institutions that Laliberté deems a "new development" in China.[39] On the other, Ji calls these philanthropic services "mere monetary donations" rather than direct assistance to people.[40] In short, no Buddhist charitable activities in Mainland China can escape governmental surveillance, to the point that "Chinese Buddhism not only cannot function as a source of civil religion, but actually becomes a conservative force in politics."[41] My fieldwork data resonate somewhat with Ji's comments on monetary donations. Some of my Mainland Chinese informants told me about their charity work during discussions focused on the issue of whether it is acceptable for monastics to touch money.[42] Just like their counterparts in Luminary nunnery, many were said to spend their money helping people, (re)printing Buddhist books and *sūtras* to aid the spread of Buddhism, and supporting Buddhist education projects.[43] While Mainland China does not frown upon charitable activities, potential monastic philanthropists there may nevertheless encounter restrictions— notably, that they keep such activities within their own monasteries. In other words, it is not possible for them to provide help in public places such as hospitals or accident sites, due to various civil regulations and restrictions. Monetary donations thus appear to be an important, yet safe and uncontroversial, way for them to engage in

39. André Laliberté, "Buddhist Charities and China's Social Policy: An Opportunity for Alternate Civility?" *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 158 (2012): 113.

40. Ji Zhe, "Chinese Buddhism as a Social Force: Reality and Potential of Thirty Years of Revival," *Chinese Sociological Review* 45, no. 2 (2013): 21.

41. Ibid., 21.

42. For detailed discussion of money-handling precept, see Chiu Tzu-Lung, "Rethinking the Precept of Not Taking Money in Contemporary Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese Buddhist Nunneries," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 21 (2014): 9–56.

43. Wu Yin, *Choosing Simplicity: Commentary on the Bhikshuni Pratimoksha*, trans. Bhikshuni Jendy Shih, ed. Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2001), 237.

charity work.[44] From the above, we can see that the sociopolitical context of Mainland China is not an entirely free or open environment for monastic members' development of relevant charitable work in public. This factor would tend inevitably to influence the mode of practicing the *bodhisattva* path in the contexts of Mainland China Mahāyāna Buddhism.

It is clear that monastics' socially engaged practices are manifested differently in Taiwan and Mainland China, and that this may be partly due to the closed nature of the Mainland Chinese political system, especially as regards religion. Moreover, monastic practitioners' perceptions of the applicability of the *bodhisattva* ideal in Mainland China should not be dealt with out of context, but seen as closely related to that country's socio-political development and present-day conditions. It would seem that a variety of factors, also including differential levels of Humanistic Buddhism's popularity and sociopolitical contexts have influenced these two regions' divergent modes of practicing the *bodhisattva* precepts and path. Certainly it would be inaccurate to assert that all Chinese Buddhist monastics in Taiwan and Mainland China practice the *bodhisattva* path similarly.

3. Conclusions

Since the medieval period, the steady development of *bodhisattva* ideas has seen them emerge as key characteristics of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. My fieldwork data reveal a strong general consensus among my informant nuns in Taiwan and Mainland China regarding the nature of the *bodhisattva* precepts and ideal, but sharp differences in the details of such views. These findings can be summarized as follows. First, most of the respondents in both regions regarded *bodhisattva* precepts as more advanced and/or difficult to follow than *vinaya* rules, since the former must be policed within the mind rather than in the sphere of external behavior. Second, while Taiwan and Mainland China share similar traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Buddhist practices connected to the *bodhisattva* precepts and ideal are manifested differently across the Straits. For

44. My fieldwork observations correspond closely to those of Amandine Péronnet, to whom I am grateful for sharing her insights.

example, the practice of burning an incense ball on a preceptee's head during the ordination ceremony has customarily been performed in Taiwan for the past half century, but was officially abolished in Mainland China in 1983. Also, owing partly to the divergent historical-political development and distinct socio-economic situations of these two regions, the various Buddhist institutions I visited in Mainland China and Taiwan as part of the present research differed markedly in the amount of socially engaged work they performed for the sake of *bodhisattva* practice. Finally, a comparison of the rhetoric used by my Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese interviewees revealed nuanced but important differences in their analyses of and feelings about conflicts or tensions between *bodhisattva* precepts and *vinaya* rules. Specifically, the Mainland Chinese nuns tended to speak of these two sets of precepts as fundamentally consistent, albeit perhaps defensively; whereas two of the Taiwanese nuns referred explicitly to mismatches between them.

To sum up, while Taiwanese nuns' and Chinese nuns' religious practices differ to a perhaps unexpected extent, nearly all of my informants shared a broadly similar way of reciting *bhikṣuṇī* precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts at their *poṣadha* ceremonies. In any case, the rich and complex relationship between *vinaya* rules and *bodhisattva* precepts is a conspicuous feature of monastic practice in contemporary Chinese Buddhism and is ripe for further investigation.

You don't have to believe in the Buddha, but you must believe in the law of causality. You can do without Buddhism, but not without compassion.

[Source: The Everlasting Light: Dharma Thoughts of Master Hsing Yun]